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# Cross(ing) the Line: Leadership in Devised Theatre

## **Comments**

Presented at the Western Regional Honors Council conference in Ashland, OR, in April 2017.





# Cross(ing) the Line: Leadership in Devised Theatre

Monica Furman

Chapman University Honors Program



## What is “devised theatre?”

“Traditional” (Western) theatre focuses on the relationship between the playwright and the director. Devised theatre is a reaction to the dominant ideology; it is ensemble-created original work. A group of artists collaborate and create a play with no script and, sometimes, no initial theme or message. They use various different art forms as well as interviews and narratives to create a theatrical experience.



## So...why does it need a director?

Throughout my own four-year journey from ensemble member to director of Chapman University's devised theatre group *Cross the Line*, I have found a director is integral for the following:

### ❖ Perspective

- ❖ Outside analysis of ensemble work
- ❖ Acts as audience
- ❖ Provides alternate visual account

### ❖ Cohesiveness

- ❖ Keeps group dynamic on track
- ❖ Suggests topics be removed or examined separately

### ❖ Collaboration

- ❖ Curates outside opportunities to bond and work on ensemble dynamic or research

### ❖ Organization

- ❖ Planning rehearsal time and space, grant writing, scheduling performance dates, research outings

### ❖ Definition

- ❖ *But what does it all mean?*

## Is this information useful for “real life?”

As a double major in theatre performance and peace studies, I began to make connections between devised theatre and organizational leadership.

### ❖ Community Organizing

- ❖ Devised theatre values democracy.
- ❖ Devised theatre creates a common language.
- ❖ New relationships are developed (chosen not by pre-determined value to society).
- ❖ Demands holistic workforce.

### ❖ Grassroots Activism

- ❖ “theatre as metaphor” to “theatre as intervention” (Nissley 819)
- ❖ Theatre is driven by a “super-problem,” creating a transient state during the performance.
- ❖ The audience's opinion of a certain issue or willingness to act will hopefully change with the characters portrayed onstage.

### ❖ Mediation

- ❖ “group dynamics, relationships, and interaction between people are a distinguishing feature of devising theatre” (Oddey 7)

### ❖ Governing

- ❖ “potential freedom or opportunity to move in a number of different directions through a collaborative work process” (Oddey 3)

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